1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

X-796

bamboo poles[1] specially erected in the middle of the dancing-ground and round which *Taur Na-mbak* will later be danced, while other smaller ones are simply made fast to the branches of trees overhanging the ground. These hawk-banners are remarkable and very impressive objects manufactured in the shape of flat kites anything up to twelve or fifteen feet long. Made out of plaited coconut leaves on a light bamboo framework, the main body of the kite is lozenge-shaped, with projections on either side to represent wings and another at the rear to represent a tail, while to the head is fixed a conventionally carved and painted figure of the head and wings of a bird such as is normally used as the prow-head (*na-hō*) of a canoe. The whole effect is enhanced by long fringes hanging from each edge.

[524]

Kites figure in several semi-historical or mythological tales in the Small Islands (examples of which will be given in a forthcoming volume on Atchin), but are no longer, so far as I know, actually flown.[2] The huge objects now erected are certainly not meant to be flown, and, apart from their being referred to in this context as "hawks" and the general association of hawks with the Maki, I am unable to give any explanation of why they are erected now. It would be easy to imagine, in accordance with the belief in a sky-world connected with the higher Maki ranks, that they symbolise a flight into the sky, and even that in some way they were meant to transport the Maki-men thither, but the fact of the matter is that they are erected only to be torn down on the Eve of the great sacrifice, as will shortly be seen.[3]

Whatever their real significance, the importance of these symbols is shown by the fact that while they are being erected all present sing songs of the *Taur Na-mbak* song-and-dance cycle.

Parties from all villages arrive. Members of introducing "line" dance Settling-Down.

Parties from all the Vao villages and from the mainland and the neighbouring Small Islands now assemble to hear the ceremonial an-

[1] These poles are called *na-mbu*, meaning simply "bamboo," and the act of setting them up is called *ra gheli na-mbu*, "we plant the bamboos." On Atchin wooden sacrificial poles called *pal-pal* stand permanently in the middle of the dancing-ground, and it is to these that the hawk-banners are made fast.

[2] They are, however, still flown, or were so till recently, on the neighbouring island of Oba. See Speiser, 3, Pl. 29, Figs. 6 and 7. Deacon also mentions kite-flying as a game in South-West Bay (Deacon, 4, p. 44). Codrington, 3, p. 318, describes a method of fishing by means of kites practised in the Solomon Islands. "The kite is flown from a canoe, and from it hangs a line with a tangle of spider's web or of fibre, which it drags along the water, and in which a fish with a projecting under jaw entangles its teeth." In the Banks Islands and the Northern New Hebrides they are now used only as toys. In the Banks Islands they are called *rea* and in Oba *mala*, "an eagle" (p. 342), which is the same word as the Vao *na-mbal*.

[3] See p. 384. Hawk-banners are similarly erected at Matanavat. See Harrisson, 2, p. 31.

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

CHAPTER XXV

SAND-TRACINGS FROM VAO AND ATCHIN

BASED ON THE LABYRINTH MYTHOLOGY OF SOUTH-WEST MALEKULA

1. EXPLANATORY INTRODUCTION

The Setting.

AMONG a people whose artistic sense is expressed primarily not in the plastic arts but in dramatic performances and in the elaboration of ritual, one element of culture that easily escapes the casual observer is that of the ingenious designs drawn by the natives in the sand or in the fine volcanic dust that covers the floor of the dancing-grounds or any swept space such as is found in any house-enclosure, or in the cold ashes of a dead fire. As, according to the mythological account given below, they are all derived from a design traced in the sand, I propose to refer to them throughout as "Sand-Tracings."

These designs, which used apparently to be drawn by women,[1] are now drawn by men as a kind of pastime, with which are combined the elements of a game of skill. The only tool used is the designer's own finger, with which the designs are traced. The Vao word for this is *ghir*, as opposed to the widespread Malekulan word *ul* used for painting.[2]

Continuous-line technique.

All the designs follow the same fundamental plan. First a framework is traced, consisting either of a number of straight lines set at right angles and crossing one another, or else of small circles set in a regular pattern. The pastime consists in tracing round and round and in and out of these straight lines or small circles a geometrical design formed of a single continuous line. In all cases the skill arises from the fact that once the continuous line is started the finger must not be withdrawn till the entire figure is completed.

Design called "The Path" drawn by the Guardian Ghost in South-West Malekula.

When I first noted the existence of these designs in the Small Islands I did not know they had any significance other than as pure games of

[1] See Godefroy, 1, 1933, p. 47, who adds "as they are still done by women in Santo."
[2] Compare Mota *ul*, "to smear, paint, draw figures on a Tamate hat" (Codrington, 2).

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
OO12 Malekula OO12

Malekulan labyrinth belongs to early unstereotyped kind.

158 Such dream-walking represents an introverted state sanctioned by
531 culture in which, so far as we know, the dream-walker follows no stereo-
171 typed route. It is therefore of interest when compared with the question of labyrinth designs, since in the early history of the labyrinth this also had no stereotyped form, being simply a complicated way intended to confuse or baffle those who were not familiar with its plan. Stereotyped forms of labyrinth such as that of the well-known labyrinth design of the coins of Knossos did not occur till the labyrinth had lost its meaning as a form of initiation through which the candidate wishing to solve the mysteries of death and re-birth had to pass.

Now used as games of skill and named according to the designer's fancy.

531 An examination of the Malekulan labyrinth designs shows that these
524 belong to such an early unstereotyped stage, since, of all those collected in Malekula and the neighbouring islands both by myself and Deacon, and in Raga by Miss Hardcastle and Dr. Firth,[1] no two are alike. Indeed, now that they are used as games of skill this tendency, as with cats' cradles, with which they are probably allied, now serves to stimulate the creative ingenuity of the natives, who, while certain designs, of course, become traditional and are copied over and over again, constantly invent new ones as an intellectual pastime. Each new design is given a name, as a rule to suit the designer's fancy, though in the case of one particular type, as will be shown, the names almost always have to do with ghosts.

Two Main Types of Design

531 While, as we have seen, the individual designer is at liberty to exercise his fancy to a certain extent, he is, however, in other respects strictly confined within the limits described at the beginning of this chapter, namely the tracing of a continuous-line design meandering in and about a framework consisting of:

A, straight lines, often set at right angles and crossing one another, which I will refer to as a linear framework; or

B, small circles set in a regular pattern.

While in actual practice these two types sometimes overlap, the two categories are nevertheless important, since each originally represented a different aspect of the labyrinth myth. The evidence dealing with the origin of these two types is set out fully and with reproductions of the most relevant designs in the article already referred to,[2] and can here only be summarised in a manner that might appear arbitrary were it not possible for the student to follow it out in detail in the article mentioned.

[1] Published in Deacon, 5. [2] Layard, 6.